

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous

Individual



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As a former bookseller and bookshop owner who was forced to close due to rising commercial rents, increasing operating costs and static or declining unit prices. I now work as an author and illustrator, largely publishing overseas, because the local market that would otherwise support Australian creative work has been so significantly weakened.

Independent bookshops are far more than retail spaces. They sustain a diverse literary ecosystem by championing local voices, emerging creators and smaller publishers, and in many communities they provide an accessible form of cultural participation through readings, school events, book launches and conversations that bring people together.

These shops create space for regional voices, First Nations storytelling, independent publishing, children's literature and works that reflect the full complexity and diversity of Australian life. In an increasingly globalised and algorithm-driven marketplace, they help preserve cultural distinctiveness and ensure Australians continue to encounter stories grounded in their own communities. When they close, Australian writers, illustrators and publishers lose their most important advocates, and creators are pushed to seek overseas publishers and markets simply to survive.

A Sector Under Pressure

Independent bookshops face serious structural disadvantages. Department stores and online platforms frequently use books as loss-leaders, selling otherwise profitable titles below the price that independents can purchase them wholesale. The recent loss of Boffins in Perth, Berkelow in Leichhardt, Red Door in Lancefield, Embiggen Books in Melbourne, Kerang Books, Bradstreet's Books in Hawthorn and many others creates a strain on the entire ecosystem that supports Australian cultural diversity, with obvious consequences for the economic underpinnings of the sector.

International Precedent

Other countries have treated this not as a retail problem but as a cultural one. France's 1981 Loi Lang fixed book prices and capped retail discounts at 5% regardless of seller, keeping around 3,500 independent bookshops viable. France later banned free shipping on online book orders and in 2023 added a minimum delivery surcharge. Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands have similar legislation.

Policy Recommendations

I urge the new National Cultural Policy to:

Formally recognise independent bookshops as cultural infrastructure, equivalent to galleries, libraries and theatres.

Introduce commercial tenancy relief for independent bookshops, modelled on the UK's 2025 business rates reform for smaller retail premises.

Introduce a minimum delivery fee for online book orders, modelled on France's 2023 law, to stop online retailers using postage to undercut physical shops.

Investigate fixed or minimum book pricing legislation, referencing France's Loi Lang and its 40-year track record of sustaining a diverse bookselling sector.

Establish a cultural contribution mechanism for online book retailers, modelled on the News Media Bargaining Code, to reinvest a portion of Australian book revenue into the physical bookselling sector.

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Address loss-leader pricing by large discount retailers through targeted consumer protection or cultural goods legislation.

Establish grants or low-interest loan programs for bookshops under financial pressure, with priority for regional and rural communities where they are often the sole provider of cultural programming.

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